

The book: adam, eve,
and the serpent-by:
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When God Given Morality Replaces Free Will Within the deeply woven analysis of the creation and early history of the Christian religion, Elaine Pagels has unmasked centuries of ambiguous deceit. She tells the story of Christianity replacing the Roman traditions and in doing so unravels the real motivation for the persecution of early Christians. The church required morality as a rallying point to bring the diverse groups that called themselves Christian together. This morality and focused commitment would also be used to confront the Gnostics of the era.

Texts that had been lost for 16 centuries have recently been uncovered and indicate that the church may have deliberately misled its followers in the beginning. The texts that were discovered near Nag Hammadi recount the early movement towards self-enlightenment. The story of Adam and Eve is central to the modern interpretation of the bible and the lost scrolls point to the fallacy of the bible's historical accuracy. These early divergent paths paved the way for the twin philosophies of " history with a moral" and " myth with meaning" (64).

Examining the biblical account of the Garden of Eden can yield decidedly different meaning depending on which viewpoint is taken. Pagels states that when interpreted through the Secret Book of John, Eve is the primal intelligence that wakes Adams inner self and illuminates his soul. Yet, Christians viewed the story as a moral teaching, which granted its followers moral freedom. The freedom was the escape from free will and into a life where the decisions were preordained. These decisions are most apparent in matters of sexuality, greed, and over consumption. Adam had been ordained with the freedom of choice and according to Augustine this freedom was the root of all sin. The greater freedom would be the freedom from temptation

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that is gained by following the strict morality of the early church.

"Adam, Eve, and the Serpent" relates the contradictory nature of the Genesis story. On the one hand, man is given free will by a compassionate God, yet is born with an original sin that is passed on through generations through no act of their own. These contradictions of interpretation continue to shape our concept of sin.

The book was very informative and has highlighted the risk we take when interpreting biblical texts. Interpretations that have been passed down for centuries may be based on incomplete or fabricated writings. Religion can be a very personal approach to daily living or may be a guide to spiritual attainment. Morality limits our choices and in doing so gives us freedom from temptation.

However, this freedom comes at the expense of our own free will. The point at which we decide for ourselves where morality lies and where morality is pronounced by God is the Genesis moment and the dilemma that faced Adam. This book teaches us that it is up to each of us as individuals to make that choice. I would suggest that anyone who would like a better understanding of free will and original sin read "Adam, Eve, and the Serpent". The teachings of morality by the early church may be more in the self-interest of the church than an accurate guide to life or spiritual enlightenment.

Bibliography

Pagels, Elaine. Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. New York: Random House, 1988.